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The Magic Song

MIKHAILO KOTSYUBINSKY

The Magic Song

A STORY



KIEV DNIPRO PUBLISHERS 1988

МИХАЙЛО КОЦЮБИНСЬКИЙ
ЧАРІВНА ПІСНЯ
Оповідання

Translated from the Ukrainian
by Mary Skrypnyk
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This story is an adapted
excerpt from the novel
Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors
by the Ukrainian classic
Mikhailo Kotsyubinsky (1864—1913)



Ivanko was just past seven, but he already knew a great deal about the world around him. He knew how to find the healing herbs and where the cuckoo dwelt, and he could understand the shriek of the hawk. It was not surprising that his mother kept glancing at him somewhat uncertainly when he talked about these things at home. He knew that the forest was full of woodland spirits who grazed their own herds—the deer, the rabbits and wild goats—and that the merry forest spirit Chuhaister wandered about and immediately asked all whom he met to dance, and that the ringing voice of the axe belonged in the forest.

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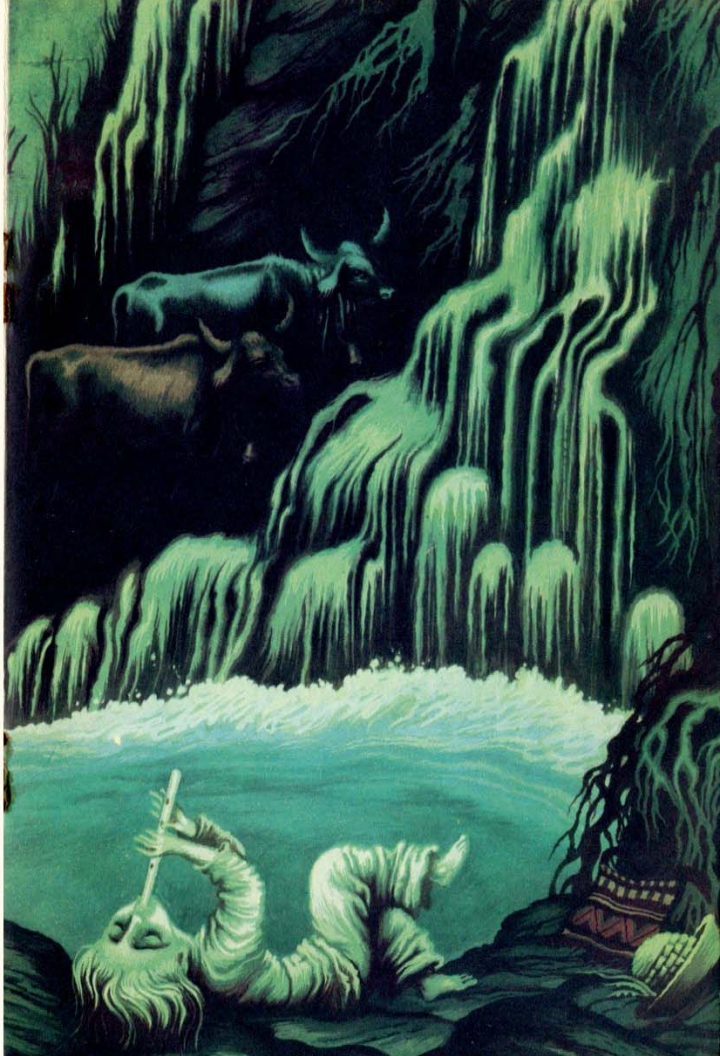
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The whole world, for Ivanko, was like a fairy tale—full of wonders, mysterious, fascinating and frightening.

Now he had responsibilities—he was sent out to pasture the cows. He took both of them, brown and gray, into the grassy woods. Each time the cows disappeared among the waves of forest grass and young firs, a melancholy tinkle of their bells reaching him as if from a deep well, he would sit down on the slope, draw out his pipe, and play a number of simple songs which he had learned from his elders. However, he wasn't happy with these melodies. After playing a little while, he would become irritated, throw down his pipe, and listen to other melodies that lived within him, vague and elusive.

From below, the dull sound of the surging mountain stream rose up to Ivanko, drowning the sounds of the hillside, with only the fitful tinkle of the cowbells interrupting the steady noise of the rushing water. The pensive mountain tops peered through the branches of the firs, changing their moods from minute to minute—when



the clearings smiled brightly, the forest would grow dark.

One day Ivanko abandoned his cows and scrambled up to the very top of the hill. He climbed up and up, over a barely visible path winding between thick overgrowths of ferns, thorny bramble and raspberry bushes. He jumped lightly from rock to rock, crawled over fallen tree trunks, and tore through the bushes. Following him from below, came the eternal roar of the stream, and as he looked back the mountain seemed to grow higher and higher.

Every stone under Ivanko's feet was covered with rust-colored moss—thick, soft and silky. Warm and tender, it caressed his feet like a dawning pillow. The bushy verdure of the blackberry had sunk its roots deep into the moss, while its branches hung low with red and black berries.

Here Ivanko sat down to rest.

The firs murmured softly above him, blending their voices with the roar of the foaming stream. The sun filled the valley below with golden light, greening the grasses. A faint



blue haze of smoke from some distant bonfire hung in the air, and a velvet boom of thunder rolled from behind the mountain.

Ivanko sat and listened, forgetting completely his task of looking after the cows.

Suddenly the sound of quiet music came into this ringing silence. It was a melody which had for so long and so tantalizingly teased Ivanko's ears, and which had even caused him suffering! Surprised and motionless, he craned his neck and listened to the wonderful melody with joyful excitement. People didn't play that way! At least he had never heard them. But who was playing? There was no one around, not a living soul, only the forest.

Ivanko looked back toward the cliff and froze. Up on the cliff-top sat *he*, the forest spirit Chuhaister. He was blowing a long pipe, his sharp little beard awry, his little horns bent, and his eyes closed. "My goats are not here . . . My goats are not here . . ." the music flowed in lament. Then suddenly the horns were raised, the cheeks puffed up and the eyes opened. "My

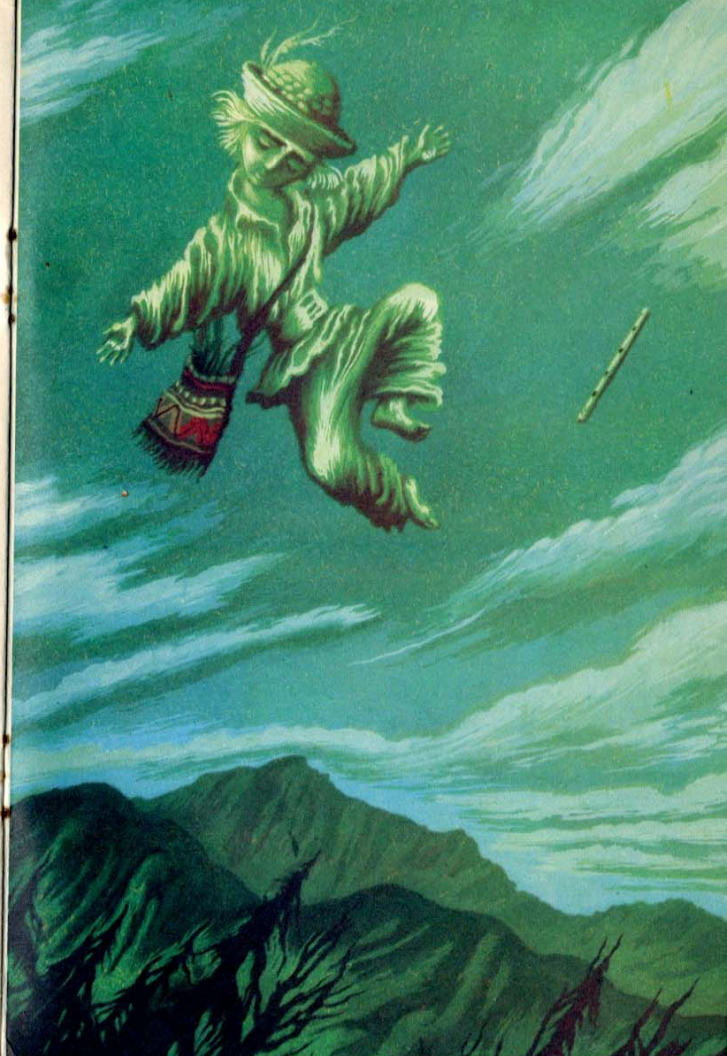


goats are here... My goats are here..." the joyous notes leaped out and Ivanko, terror-stricken, saw several goats thrust through the bushes and shake their bearded heads.

He wanted to run away, but he couldn't move. He was dumbfounded, silently screaming in cold terror. When he finally found his voice, the Chuhaister very nimbly disappeared into the cliff and the goats turned into the roots of trees overturned by the wind.

Ivanko sped blindly down the hillside, without thought, tearing through the treacherous embraces of the bramble bushes, breaking the dry branches, rolling over the slippery moss. In his terror it seemed to him that something was pursuing him in his flight. Finally he fell. How long he lay there, he couldn't remember.

Coming to his senses after some time had passed and seeing familiar places, he quieted down somewhat. He listened for a while in wonder. The song seemed to be resounding through him. He pulled out his pipe. At first nothing happened, the melody wouldn't come. Ivanko tried hard, straining his



memory and grasping at certain sounds. When he finally found what he had long been hunting for and what had given him no peace, a wonderful, as yet unknown melody echoed through the forest. Joy filled his heart and overflowed into the mountains, the forest and the grasses, gurgled into the streams and lifted Ivanko to his feet. He threw his pipe to the ground and, putting his hands to his hips, whirled into a dance. His feet pattered, he stood lightly on his toes, beat his heels against the ground, twirled and squatted. "My goats are here . . . My goats are here . . ." something sang within him. The small fair lad jumped about a sunlit mountain meadow, which had stolen into the gloomy kingdom of the firs. He was flitting like that butterfly from stem to stem, while the two cows, brown and gray, pushed their heads through the surrounding bushes and gazed at him amiably, chewing their cud and occasionally ringing their bells in time to his dancing.

That was how Ivanko found in the forest what he had long been hunting for.

